concluding that most are 'conscious agents of political interests'. Some NGOs are more explicit about the politicized nature of their work than others. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan respondent noted that their aims were '*politically motivated*' to '*show solidarity with Afghanistan*', whist the Ockenden Venture interviewee took the opposite position and claimed '*NGOs should not support politics*'. The Committee for a Free Afghanistan received funding from the World Anti-Communist League to operate 'Project Boots' which supplied footwear to *Mujahidin* based in Pakistan. The Council for International Development ran a 'Help the Mujahidin' project, and the Afghan Support Team even went so far as to claim that it educated Afghan refugees about guerrilla warfare[20]. NGOs which did not have explicit political agendas often found that their relief efforts were unavoidably politicized. Distribution of relief items in the early 1980s was delegated by these NGOs to the Alliance parties[21] and for cross-border NGOs to work within Afghanistan, they had to either collaborate with Afghan parties in Peshawar, or deal directly with Afghan resistance commanders in the field. Either way they were drawn into intra- and inter-party power struggles.

The evidence presented above suggests that not only were those who masterminded refugee assistance motivated by geopolitical agendas, but the work of NGOs responsible for implementing the aid policies was, either consciously or unconsciously, often heavily politicized. According to Gorman (1993: 287) 'humanitarianism ultimately cannot be divorced from politics, nor politics separated from humanitarianism'. By prioritizing a political agenda, the humanitarian rationale to aid provision is marginalized. There are, however, dangers in being explicit about the geopolitical role of 'humanitarian' aid. As Walker (1995: 69) notes, 'humanitarian assistance is able to operate in situations of violence because it is seen to be independent, impartial and neutral'. Read one way this statement runs counter to the argument that Afghan aid is deeply politicized. If it is considered again in the light of arguments made above, another interpretation can be made. It is important for assistance to be *seen* to be humanitarian, independent, impartial and neutral, so that the underlying geopolitical agenda remains obscured.

The ending of assistance

Levels of aid to Afghan refugees in the post-Soviet era

Figure 1 shows the cumulative aid total allocated to Afghan refugees, between 1989 and 1994, by the fourteen NGOs interviewed for this paper. Dupree's comment (Dupree, 1988: 845) that international assistance as a whole is 'dwindling' suggests that the trend is reflective of overall changes in the levels of aid provided by the international community to Afghan refugees in the post-Soviet era. Assistance fell from over $17.5 million at the beginning of 1990, to only a quarter of this amount ($4.6 million) in 1994.

In the period 1989-1994 the decline in American assistance has been 'dramatic' (Khalilzad, 1995: 152). In US financial year 1992-1993, American aid for Afghanistan totalled $40 million, already well below its 1986 peak of $630 million (Rubin, 1995a: 181). In 1993-1994 the figure was $6 million and by 1994-1995 the level of assistance was 'insignificant' (Hyman, 1994: 233). UNHCR also began to phase out activities over this period, a trend heralded by Sadako Ogata's statement that 'UNHCR care and maintenance programmes could not be continued indefinitely' (18/06/91, private correspondence to Pakistan's Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif; Ogata, 1991). After a gradual reduction of assistance in the early 1990s, UNHCR and WFP announced that 'ration distribution for refugee care and maintenance feeding programmes will terminate as at 30th September 1995' (09/07/95, press release; UNHCR/WFP, 1995).

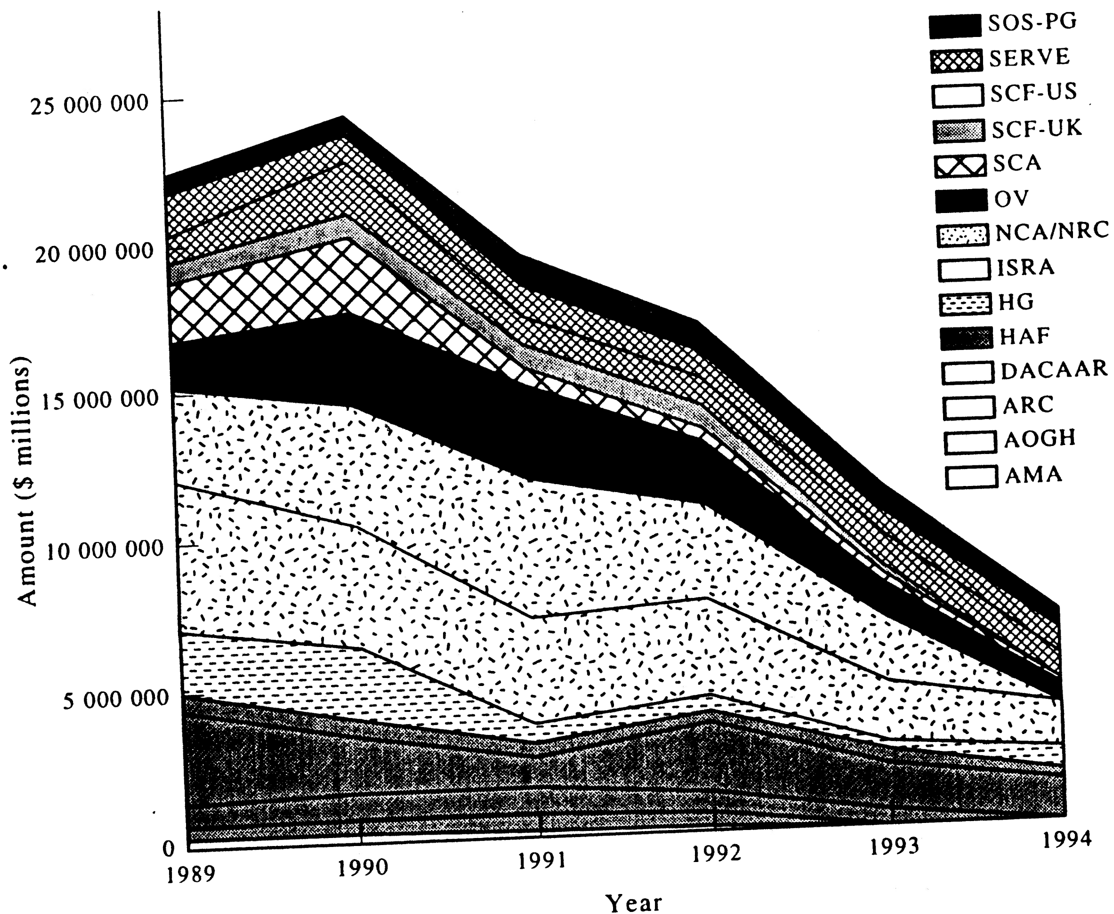


FIGURE 1. Graph showing the cumulative aid total ($ million) allocated to Afghan refugees by NGOs interviewed (1989–1994) (*Source*: ACBAR, 1995c).

The geopolitical context

To understand the changes in aid provision shown in *Figure 1* it is important to outline the geopolitical context as there is a 'clear relationship between declining political interest in Afghanistan and declining rations for the refugees in Pakistan' (Marsden, 1991: 1). The completion of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989 (Cordovez and Harrison, 1995: 384) corresponds with the downturn in aid to Afghan refugees (*Figure 1*). The Soviets remained involved in Afghan affairs via a puppet regime headed by the late Najibullah. On 1 January 1992 the Soviet Union ceased assisting Najibullah as part of a process of 'negative symmetry' (Findlay, 1993: 188)[22], and by the middle of April he had fallen from power. Rubin (1994: 185) notes that 'the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 led ineluctably to the collapse of the Najibullah regime in April 1992'. This 'watershed change in the global geopolitical environment' (Grant and Nijman, 1995: 215) corresponds with an even steeper fall in the cumulative aid total allocated to Afghan refugees by the NGOs interviewed (*Figure 1*). Afghanistan became an Islamic Republic on 27 April 1992, but fighting did not cease.

Policy reasonings behind the ending of assistance to Afghan refugees

Non-governmental organisations One of the reasons most commonly cited by NGO interviewees to explain the ending of assistance was the fall of the Najibullah regime in April 1992. It was only after this date that NGOs began to terminate projects with refugees.

What is also apparent from the interviews with NGOs is the influence of their donors (IGOs, governments, private individuals, etc.) on their decision to close projects. The Help the Afghan Foundation respondent stated that '*we are always dependent on our donors*' and the Save the Children Fund-US interviewee commented that his organisation was '*donor driven*'. It was also revealing to note that the name of one of Solidarite Afghanistan Belgium's projects had been changed from the 'Apprenticeship Scheme for Young Afghan Refugees' to the 'Apprenticeship Scheme for Young Afghans'. The removal of the word 'refugees' was done at the beginning of 1994 in order to secure funding. These examples suggest that there is a case for viewing NGOs merely as *implementers* of policy towards Afghan refugees, divorced from the process of policy *formulation*. It is hard to generalize however, so perhaps it is more accurate to view NGOs as being able to formulate aid policy, but only within the parameters set by their donors. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan respondent, for example, noted that NGOs had a '*responsibility*' to support Afghan refugees '*but little capacity*' to do so, because of a lack of donor interest, and Solidarite Afghanistan Belgium '*had to decrease activities because of less funds*'. The Save the Children Fund-UK interviewee also stated that donors were '*not ready to support proposals for funding projects in Pakistan*'. This response concurs with Hyman's observation (Hyman, 1994: 232) that since the Soviet withdrawal 'pledges by big donor states are hard to find, and apathy abounds'. Other NGO respondents noted this situation, with the Austrian Relief Committee for Afghans interviewee stating that '*donor interest was less*' and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan respondent commenting that there was an '*obvious decline in support*'.

Donor influence To understand the reasonings behind the ending of assistance to Afghan refugees, it is vital to draw back from the micro-scale implementation of projects by NGOs, and consider the motivations of the donors which fund the network of NGOs that implement refugee policy. In the 1980s Afghanistan was 'at the top of the World agenda', but in the 1990s it 'ranks very low as a global priority' (Khalilzad, 1995: 152). Since the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan there has been very little concern about Afghanistan's fate in the United States, Western Europe and East Asia. Sorenson (1991: 37) succinctly expresses this fundamental shift in geopolitical priorities, stating that 'following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the situation lost much of its perceived strategic significance for the West, media coverage declined and cuts in international assistance followed'. Rubin (1994: 185) adds that once Afghanistan was 'no longer a buffer between contending empires or alliance systems', it 'lost the financial and military aid'. Grant and Nijman (1997: 45-46) make the important point that the link between Pakistan's diminished geopolitical significance and the sharp decline in US aid to Pakistan indicates 'the singular geostrategic motivation behind American aid'. Since the Cold War ended a number of countries such as Morocco, the Philippines and Pakistan are no longer as 'interesting to the US and its burden sharing Northern partners' (Grant and Nijman, 1995: 217) who have redirected aid to 'newly defined areas of vital interest' (Grant and Nijman, 1997: 37). These countries may be labelled 'Cold War orphans', as they have experienced the shift in Western foreign aid policies in the context of the present geopolitical transition to a post-Soviet new world order. Areas such as Eastern Europe and other economies in transition may now be of greater concern to the international aid community than former Cold War buffer states like Pakistan. Rubin (1995b: 142) concurs with this line of argument, attributing Afghanistan's transition from 'buffer state' to an 'arena of regional conflict' to the end of the Cold War and hegemonic decline.

The UN has also adjusted its priorities in response to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the words of the UNHCR Community Services Officer interviewed for this paper, '*Afghanistan is no longer a big issue with the UN*'. Hyman (1994: 233) concurs with this viewpoint, stating that 'since the advent of the new world order. Afghanistan is way down the (UN's) agenda'. The CAR respondent regarded UNHCR as being '*in a very tight corner*', as '*where ever there is trouble they have to go there*'. Although UNHCR has an agenda of its own, its work is 'financed almost entirely from voluntary contributions from governments, non-governmental organisations and individuals' (UNHCR, 1988: 18), so it too is heavily constrained by the funding it receives from donors. With regard to Afghanistan, this means that 'most (UN) agencies are experiencing decreasing funds, as Afghan refugees are no longer seen as a priority by donors' (UNHCR, 1994: 1).

A recurrent explanation from the NGO and UN personnel interviewed for this paper, as to why donors were not interested in funding relief projects for Afghan refugees, was one of 'donor fatigue' (Dupree, 1988: 845). The Austrian Relief Committee respondent, for example, noted that '*donors get tired*'. The UNHCR Repatriation Officer interviewed stated that donors '*are fed up*' and explained this frustration in terms of the remaining refugees' failure to swiftly repatriate, stating that '*it's like you help them and they're not saying thank you* (by repatriating)'. This controversial statement suggests firstly that UNHCR is providing assistance to refugees in order to engender indebtedness and gratitude, rather than to the purported (UNHCR, 1988: 5) unconditional provision of protection and assistance. Secondly, it implies that repatriation is the *expected* rather than 'preferred' (UNHCR, 1988: 16) outcome of UNHCR activities. The link between donor fatigue and the geopolitics of the Afghan refugees' situation is encapsulated in the Help the Afghans Foundation interviewee's comment that '*civil war is never attractive* (to donors)'. This statement is also controversial, as it implies that foreign intervention (or Soviet expansionism in the case of Afghanistan) is a greater motivation and justification for the provision of assistance to 'refugees' than civil war, even though civil war is specifically referred to in the 1967 OAU Protocol, as a rationale for the provision of international assistance.

Within academic discourse the argument that the West has 'grown weary of the Afghan refugees' (Rose, 1991: 8) is widespread. They are perceived as an 'endless burden' (Wood, 1994: 628) prevented from repatriating by a 'deadlocked conflict' within their country of origin. This was also noted in the Islamic Relief Agency interviewee's expression of incomprehension as to '*why* (are) *the people still fighting?*'. From here the 'endless burden' (Wood, 1994: 628) line of argument progresses to the 'dilemma UN agencies and donor countries face as they try to stretch limited resources to respond to myriad humanitarian crises world-wide' (Wood, 1994: 628). Clearly Western overseas development assistance (ODA) to developing countries is finite, totalling about $53 billion in 1995 (Walker, 1995: 68), but 'the number of emergencies requiring an international response has risen at an alarming rate through the 1990s' (Walker, 1995: 68). As we enter the post-Soviet era 'fresher troubles and tragedies' (Hyman, 1994: 232) such as those in Zaire, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia may be making a 'more relevant and pressing' (Hyman, 1994: 232) geopolitical case for the limited assistance available from fatigued donor sources, than the situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The problematic consequences and long-term concerns of ending assistance

The proxy war: an endless turmoil?

On 27 April 1992 Afghanistan became an Islamic Republic, but fighting within Afghanistan did not come to an end. This 'seemingly endless period of civil strife' (Rais, 1994: 255)

continues to the present day (Abdullah, 1997a, 1997b; Dynes, 1996: 15). The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan is regarded by some observers (Ali, 1990: 28; Aziz, 1987: 51; Hyman, 1994: 229; Rubin, 1994: 186; Sareen, 1989: 32) as having allowed an underlying 'social reality' (Rubin, 1994: 186) of power relations fractured by ethnic, religious and linguistic divisions to re-emerge. The UN coordinator, Sadruddin Aga Khan's comment that 'Afghans have fought among themselves and against outsiders ever since the country appeared on the map' (cited in Ali, 1990: 28) provides a typical example of this line of argument. Proponents of this position play up the fact that arms are 'cherished cultural symbols' (Christensen, 1990: 62) in which Afghans invest 'as others would in a savings bank' (Christensen, 1990: 62). This supposedly problematizes the transition to peace in post-Soviet Afghanistan, as 'a lot of young Afghan men whose identity is defined by carrying a weapon have no inclination to take up another life-style' (Rose, 1992: 10). However, other observers (ACBAR, 1995b: 5; Hyman, 1994: 232; RPG, 1992: 24) note the 'increasing disillusionment' (RPG, 1992: 24) and 'bitterness' (Hyman, 1994: 232) Afghans feel towards the continuing conflict. On 29 April 1995 hundreds of members of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) staged a demonstration against the *Mujahidin* leaders and *Taliban*, who they blamed for prolonging the Afghan conflict (ACBAR, 1995b: 5; Rais, 1994: 258). Discontent with political leaders was also noted by the Afghan Medical Aid respondents who referred to '*idiot like mullahs*[23]', and the belief that there were only '*animals to run the country*'. The interviews with refugees revealed similar attitudes, with the *Mujahidin* militia men referred to as '*Gilam Jam*'; literally this means carpet thieves, a name given because of their tendency to rob so extensively that they even steal the carpets. These findings corroborate Pottier's challenge (Pottier, 1996b: 324) of the 'myth that refugees and leaders hold common views'.

If, as the above examples suggest, there is an overall decline in support, among the Afghan populace, for the political parties and armed militias involved in the ongoing Afghan conflict, it is important to ask whose interests are being served by the continued fighting (Keen, 1996: 15). The answers to this question lie in the 'external intrusions' (Rais, 1993: 905) of regional powers like Pakistan, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the Central Asian States[24]. Rais (1993: 905) expands upon this, noting that 'Afghanistan's location at the tri-junction of the three strategic regions of South, South-West, and Central Asia both raises its importance for its neighbours and makes it vulnerable to their adverse influences'. The Afghan militias and political parties involved in the ongoing conflict are backed by these regional powers, each of which have their own conflicting geopolitical agendas. RPG (1992: 24) makes the important point that 'resistance leaders have cynically manipulated the refugees' to achieve these political ends. By calling for a continued *jihad*[25] against other competing factions, they exploit the refugees' deeply held religious faith. Such manipulation has been found in other contexts as well. Dodge *et al.* (1993: 213) conclude that refugees were 'manipulated by the conflicting parties' in Sudan and Reynell (1989: 20) concludes that refugees on the Thai-Kampuchean border were 'in essence pawns in a wider political power game'. But the Afghan leaders are themselves being 'shrewdly manipulated' (Hyman, 1994: 229) by outside forces, which are exploiting inter-faction rivalries. The conflict within Afghanistan is better referred to as a 'proxy' war rather than a 'civil' war, as the word proxy stresses the complicity of external competing factions in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Rais (1994: 263) also notes 'the creation and exploitation of a geopolitical situation by a large number of actors', and Reynell (1989:10) observes that conflicts such as this 'are exacerbated and fuelled by external powers'.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia views Afghanistan as part of its 'near

abroad' (Khalilzad, 1995: 151)[26]. Pakistan has 'vital interests' (Rais, 1993: 912) in securing a friendly regime, to ensure that it gets access to the emerging Central Asian economies. The Commonwealth of Independent States is estimated (Palmer, 1994: 116) to contain about one-sixth of the world's total mineral resources. As well as trade the supply of gas from Turkmenistan's Dauletabad field is proposed, via a UNOCAL-Delta-Gazprom pipeline to feed power plants in Pakistan. There are plans (Arab News, 1996a: 5) to export crude oil from Turkmenistan's Chardzhou field via a terminal on Pakistan's Arabian sea coast. Both these schemes rely on pipelines across Afghan territory (EPW, 1996: 2714; Carver and Englefield, 1994: 119). Pakistan is also keen to gain 'strategic depth' (Rubin, 1995a: 247) against India by planting a friendly Islamic regime in Kabul, an outcome India is keen to prevent. Iran is seeking greater representation for *Shi'ite*[27] parties in any future Afghan government (Emadi, 1995: 10; Fuller, 1991:180; Mohaddessin, 1993: 67). It is also keen to prevent any alignment of Afghans with Saudi Arabia, which is 'a major contributor of money fuelling the fighting' (Hyman, 1994: 232), as this would bring Saudi influence 'into its backyard' (Rais, 1993: 916). The *Taliban* may turn out to be the product of a post-Gulf war consensus between Saudi, Pakistani and United States economic and ideological interests. It is important to place these factors at the forefront of any explanation of why the proxy war is still continuing, and recognize Khalilzad's statement (Khalilzad, 1995: 151) that 'Afghanistan has become an arena in which regional powers are competing for influence', rather than adopting the position discussed earlier that locates the causes of the conflict within the culture and society of the Afghan populace. This second line of argument (Dorronsoro, 1995: 37; Hippler, 1993: 188) eschews the international geopolitical dimensions of the 'proxy war'.

An examination of the ending of assistance to Afghan refugees, which is informed by the issues raised above, reveals two fundamental geopolitical problems with the decision to terminate aid. Firstly, the ending of assistance is accompanied by an assumption that peace can be achieved in Afghanistan by direct foreign involvement. Hyman (1994: 232), for example, states that 'it is difficult to see any end to this struggle for power in Afghanistan without active intervention by the international community', and Sareen (1989: 32) states that 'without excessive external interference, the civil war could go on for several years'. These ideas have found favour with observers commenting on the current conflict between the *Taliban* and forces loyal to Rabbani's ousted government. UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali stated that 'a multilateral presence was needed in Kabul if any cease-fire was reached' (cited in Arab News, 1996b: 1). These ideas clash markedly with the arguments made above, which assert that it is precisely *because* of excessive external interference that the 'proxy war' is so intractable. It is particularly troubling that Hyman (1994: 232) calls for active foreign intervention when he himself notes the 'shrewd manipulation' (Hyman, 1994: 229) resulting from Pakistani intervention in Afghan affairs.

A second geopolitical difficulty involves the ending of assistance being linked to the restoration of 'a unified central government' (Rose, 1992: 12) within Afghanistan which can then negotiate for 'foreign assistance, investment and trade' (Rose, 1992: 12). The existence of an 'Islamic Government' was mentioned by a majority of the refugees as the key precondition for their return. This may, in part, explain the success of the *Taliban* movement who are attempting a 're-sacralization' (Olesen, 1995: 298) of the state, by using Islamic orthodoxy as a powerful appeal for legitimacy. This fits with Olesen's observation (Olesen, 1995: 298) that 'the ultimate source of legitimacy is Allah'. The *Taliban* is however an almost exclusively Pathan movement which is unlikely to appeal to other ethnic groups. It is possible that the *Taliban* can occupy a hegemonic position, but Afghanistan may 'politically fragment along ethnic lines' (Rais, 1994: 256), as seen in the

recent conflict for control of Mazar-E-Sharif (Cooper, 1997: 12). The splintering of Afghanistan's 'ethno-linguistic mosaic' (Anderson, 1990: 235) makes the re-establishment of a unitary style of government 'unlikely' (Tarzi, 1993: 172). The success of the *Taliban* may also raise Pathan irredentist demands for an independent *Pushtunistan*. Attempts to rebuild Afghanistan based on the dominant model of a centralized nation-state are highly problematic as they clash with the 'reality' of *localized* family and tribal power structures within Afghan culture and society. The existence of 'multiple sovereignties' (Tarzi, 1993: 173) and 'micro-societies' (Maley and Saikal, 1991: 157) means that few Afghan peasants, or traditional tribal leaders, have 'much regard' (RPG, 1992: 26) for Kabul's rulers. As noted in the seventeenth century Pathan poet Khushhal Khan Khatak's comment (cited in Suhrke, 1984: 76) 'any Afghan who raises his head will be cut down by others'[28]. Such intra-ethnic conflict may limit the longevity of the *Taliban* as a pan-Pathan movement. The impact of state-failure on the provision of assistance raises the need for the academy in general and political geographers in particular to theorize alternatives to the nation-state as the fundamental geopolitical unit for organising human affairs.

The reason most often given by NGOs to explain the ending of assistance was the fall of the Najibullah regime, an event which was equated with the '*liberation of Afghanistan*' (Solidarite Afghanistan Belgium) and the ending of hostilities. English (1989: 4) also notes this, stating that the decision to terminate aid was based, in part, upon the expectation that peace would 'settle' (English, 1989: 4) on Afghanistan. However, '*no one expected the local Mujahidin war*' (ISRA) that followed. The fall of Najibullah clearly did not equate with the liberation of Afghanistan and the ending of hostilities, and neither has the *Taliban's* seizure of Kabul. Many observers agree (Abdullah, 1997a; Hunter, 1996: 315; Maley, 1996: 276; Navlakha, 1996: 2914) that the ascendancy of the *Taliban* has only served to intensify the state of conflict within Afghanistan and its attendant refugee crisis. So, perhaps the termination of aid is taking place prematurely. The answer to this lies within the issues raised in the next section.

New refugees, vulnerable refugees and repatriation

New refugees The ongoing proxy war has created 'a continued exodus of refugees from Afghanistan' (Marsden, 1989: 1), 'fleeing insecurity and fratricidal fighting in Afghanistan' (UNHCR, 1994: 1). Renewed fighting between the *Taliban* and anti-*Taliban* alliance has prompted new flows of refugees (Abdullah, 1997a). UNHCR announced (Dynes, 1996: 15) that over 45 000 people have fled from front-line areas in North West Afghanistan. Some areas, such as Kabul, remained almost untouched during the Soviet occupation, but have suffered severe destruction since the fall of the Najibullah regime. In the last three years between 30 000 and 40 000 fatalities (Navlakha, 1996: 2913) are attributed to intercine fighting in Kabul alone. Tarzi (1993: 165) argues that the current situation is 'a human tragedy unparalleled even in Afghanistan's turbulent recent history'. According to Maley (1996: 276) 'this refugee flow should prompt some deeper reflection from those who believe that the fall of Kabul offers hope for the return of peace to Afghanistan'. More than 100 000 Afghans have died during this period and more than 600 000 have become refugees (Khalilzad, 1995: 148). *Table 2* shows the cumulative total of individuals departing Afghanistan since the Soviet withdrawal. During this time Afghanistan has itself had to absorb over 60 000 refugees who fled a conflict within Tajikistan during December 1992 and January 1993 (Brenninkmeijer, 1996: 43).

Of the 600 000 displaced Afghans estimated to have arrived in Pakistan since the Soviet withdrawal (Khalilzad, 1995: 148), only about 90 000 have been registered as refugees.

TABLE 2. Cumulative total of Afghans arriving in Pakistan since the Soviet withdrawal in February 1989

Year	*Month*	*Cumulative total of new arrivals*
1989	December	120 000
1993	March	220 000
	December	258 267
1994	February	290 000
1995	January	413 000
	August	600 000

Sources: Berglund (1994: 1); Rahman (1995: 2); Christensen (1990: 16); Khalilzad (1995: 148).

The UNHCR Repatriation Officer justified this lack of assistance in terms of the fact that the 'new' refugees '*arrive to an established system*'. This response is problematic for two reasons. Firstly the 'established system' is being dismantled. Secondly, the interviews with Afghan refugees (none of whom were recent arrivals) revealed that the 'new' refugees are regarded as being either pro-Soviet partisans, for failing to leave during the Soviet occupation, or *Gilam Jam*, for their association with the militias. This suggests they are largely excluded from the 'older' refugees' community based social support systems.

Many 'new' refugees are located in Nasar Bagh 2, the Refugee Tented Village closest to Peshawar. A visit to this RTV revealed impressive community service facilities such as health care centres, and a grid electricity system, provided by the international aid community. However, the CAR interviewee conceded that the standard of Nasar Bagh 2 was far higher than any of the other 119 or so RTVs that remain in NWFP. The UNHCR Repatriation Officer stated that '*we aren't going to let the people nearby starve to death, it looks bad, as every official visits that camp*'. This suggests that Nasar Bagh 2 is a 'showpiece' RTV, aimed at ensuring that the needs of the 'new' refugees *appear* to be met. Such 'UN tokenism' (Hyman, 1994: 232) is misleading as the needs of the majority of Afghans displaced since the Soviet withdrawal, who 'clearly constitute a vulnerable group' are not being met.

Vulnerable refugees According to a 1986 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) survey (cited in Morton, 1992: 27), vulnerable refugees are those 'who would have more than the ordinary difficulties in achieving self-reliance'. This group includes women and children, orphans, the elderly, the handicapped, households without an able-bodied male, drug addicts and widows. These social groups make up a large proportion of the refugee populace. English (1989: 21) estimates that 48 percent of the refugee population are children under 15 years of age, and 28 percent are women who, owing to female seclusion (*purdah*), are 'largely prohibited from participating in the labour force'[29]. Christensen (1990: 16) estimates that one-fifth of Afghan women have been widowed by the Soviet occupation. The statistics presented here suggest many Afghans in NWFP are highly 'vulnerable'.

Interviews with NGO personnel revealed widespread agreement that the ending of assistance is having deleterious effects on the 'vulnerable' refugees. The Islamic Relief Agency respondent, for example, stated that '*they definitely start to suffer*'. It is pertinent to focus attention on UNHCR's 'safety-net' (Berglund, 1994: 7), that has been devised to ensure that 'the special (basic) needs of the vulnerable groups and individuals' continue to be met after UN aid to non 'vulnerable' refugees was terminated on 30 September

1995. An examination of the '*Comprehensive status report on community/social services*' and the attached '*Position paper on vulnerable groups*' (Berglund, 1994) from the UNHCR field-office in Peshawar revealed three key difficulties with the UNHCR proposals. Firstly, the 'identification of vulnerable groups and individuals is made by refugees themselves' (Berglund, 1994: 5). This is problematic, as it creates the possibilities for corruption by those *Maliks*[30] chosen to perform the task. Secondly, UNHCR is attempting to provide '*targeted* assistance' (emphasis added) to reach vulnerable groups. This is in direct contradiction to an earlier UNHCR report (Morton, 1992: 31) which notes that it is 'impossible to reliably identify all vulnerable families' and concludes from this that 'the vulnerable can only be reached through a *general distribution* of rations' (emphasis added). Thirdly, UNHCR hoped that 'by the end of 1996, through promotion and strengthening of culturally appropriate social network systems (safety-nets), the Afghan refugee community at large will hopefully be able to take care of its own vulnerable (sic)' (Berglund, 1994: 7). The UNHCR Community Services Officer interviewed for this paper thought this was overly optimistic, arguing that the very fact that 'safety nets' exist shows that Afghan refugees are unable to support vulnerable individuals. Christensen (1990: 26) corroborates this stating that 'experience has shown that tribal and kinship structures operating in the camps are unable to support many of the households that have lost their able-bodied men during the war'.

According to the Social Services Officer the vulnerables' 'safety net' only involves about 14 000 individuals. It has already been shown that a majority of the remaining 'refugees' are 'vulnerable' so it is highly unlikely that a figure of 14 000 represents the 'true' extent of 'vulnerability' among the remaining 800 000 (CAR) registered refugees in NWFP. None of the Afghan refugees interviewed had heard of the scheme. Perhaps the vulnerables programme is another example of 'UN tokenism' (Hyman, 1994: 232). The Solidarite Afghanistan Belgium interviewee expressed doubt as to whether UNHCR would bother fully implementing the 'safety nets', stating that '*we'll see whether they stick to their policy or not*'. The UNHCR Repatriation Officer interviewed for this paper even asked '*is it worth it for 14,000?*' This comment has profound implications, as it contradicts the organisation's goal of devising 'special programmes' for 'particularly vulnerable individuals in each refugee situation' (UNHCR, 1988: 16). From discussion presented in this section it may be argued that UNHCR's 'vulnerables' policy is highly problematic and unlikely to buffer the negative effects of terminating assistance.

Repatriation Between January 1990 and May 1995 about 1 679 593 Afghans repatriated from Pakistan (UNHCR, 1995: 3). The year 1992 was particularly notable with over 1.2 million refugees returning after the fall of the Najibullah government. Sadako Ogata (cited in Mitchell, 1995: 4), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for example, declared that 'repatriation, in safety and dignity, is almost always the best solution'. It is important to carefully consider this statement in two ways. Firstly, *is* repatriation occurring in safety and dignity, or is the termination of aid and concomitant promotion of repatriation causing the Afghans who remain in Pakistan to return prematurely? Interviews with the refugees revealed a host of factors that made return extremely difficult, but the most commonly cited was the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. The return of refugees to a conflict situation contradicts the fundamental principle of *non-refoulement*[31].

According to Tony Land, the head of UNHCR's Peshawar sub-office (cited in Balkam, 1988: 9) 'there is no such thing as forcing the refugees back, we are not going to push

them'. However, Cecilia Ryberg, the social services officer at UNHCR's Peshawar sub-office (cited in Rose, 1992: 12) commented that 'to cut this (aid) off would be the same as forced repatriation'. The significance of this can be seen given that UNHCR terminated all assistance on 30 September 1995. English (1989: 29), in a report for UNHCR, notes that 'the active promotion of an organised repatriation may serve as a 'push' factor triggering a premature return' and yet in July 1990 UNHCR launched an organised ration card encashment programme to encourage return. Sorenson (1991: 37) notes that repatriation through this scheme 'may not be entirely voluntary'.

Sepulveda (1995: 84) makes the point that repatriation is a firmly entrenched paradigm in policy formulation on the ending of refugee situations. Academic discourse rarely questions if repatriation is in fact 'the best solution' (Ogata, cited in Mitchell, 1995: 4) and rarely explores the problematic consequences. It is important to end this section by questioning why repatriation is favoured over the other 'durable' solutions (resettlement in third countries and integration into the host society), and is being actively promoted in the highly problematic context of Afghanistan's proxy war. An answer to this lies in understanding whose interests are being served by repatriation (Adelman, 1996: 297; Sepulveda, 1995: 84). The international (aid) community is unwilling to support and maintain the Afghans as refugees because they no longer fulfil the geopolitically significant role of resisting Soviet expansionism. But it is willing to promote their repatriation as this fulfils the important geopolitical role of reconnecting *people* labelled as Afghan with a *place* labelled Afghanistan. Repatriation also avoids the long-term presence of large numbers of Afghans in Pakistan which threatens the social integrity of the host nation-state and risks the erosion of a distinct Afghan nationalism among the refugee population[32].

Conclusion

The Afghan context

International humanitarian assistance to Afghans forcibly displaced by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 was targeted at 'refugees'. Research has suggested that this label of social identity is highly problematic and contains a number of legal and theoretical omissions. It misses the socio-culturally nuanced Afghan and Pakistani contexts into which aid was delivered. Discussion has also demonstrated that the decision to provide assistance to Afghans in Pakistan was an inherently political act reflecting Cold War priorities.

The presence of Afghan refugees in North West Frontier Province is argued to have served a number of geopolitical agendas. For Pakistan, these forced migrants were used to defuse demands for an independent *Pushtunistan* and as a bargaining tool for leverage on the West. For the United States the Afghan refugees were a vital strategic buffer against Soviet expansionism, and part of a broad anti-Communist strategy. In many ways US aid was an extension of the war effort against the Soviet Union, and Afghanistan a bleeding wound leading to the ultimate demise of the USSR. The politicization of Afghan refugees was achieved by only granting refugee status to individuals who were members of Afghan resistance parties. This paper has argued that aid itself was a political instrument, utilized to further military campaigns. It was, however, important for aid to be *seen* to be humanitarian so that the underlying geopolitical agendas could remain obscured.

In the post-Soviet era the levels of assistance to Afghan refugees have fallen dramatically. This paper has demonstrated that there are clear relationships between declining



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The geopolitics of aid: the provision and termination of aid to Afghan refugees in North West Frontier Province, Pakistan

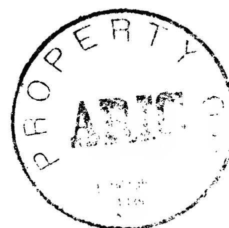
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Abstract. Aid and refugees are emerging areas of academic discourse. This paper seeks to explore the geopolitics of aid in the context of the provision and termination of international humanitarian and development assistance to Afghan refugees in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. Discussion locates the origins of the 'refugee crisis' in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The exodus of Afghans following this foreign intervention is examined in its socio-cultural context. Discussion then progresses to consider the geopolitical motivations behind the provision of assistance and the way the aid supplied became heavily politicized.

Levels of aid are shown to have fallen dramatically in the post-Soviet era, and this downturn is linked to the geopolitical repercussions of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The policy reasonings behind the ending of assistance reflect these changed geopolitical priorities, and are considered from the perspectives of both NGO and donor institutions. The geopolitics of the ongoing proxy war is carefully considered and the ending of assistance to Afghan refugees is shown to be highly problematic in humanitarian terms. Finally, discussion considers the broader implications of the conclusions drawn from the Afghan context.

Keywords geopolitics, aid, refugees, Afghanistan, proxy war, Pakistan



Introduction

Studies of aid and refugees are emerging areas of academic discourse, based upon rather limited bodies of theory. It is the aim of this paper to expand this nascent research frontier. Discussion commences with an exploration of these emerging theoretical perspectives and then raises various methodological issues. The origins of the current Afghan refugee 'crisis' are traced back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the culmination of increasing foreign involvement in Afghan affairs. International assistance to forcibly displaced Afghans is largely predicated upon and targeted at 'refugees'. The consequences of employing this problematic label of social identity in the delivery of assistance are explored. Afghan refugees performed the vital Cold War role of resisting Soviet expansionism and as a consequence received enormous assistance from the non-Communist world community. The geopolitical motivations behind the purportedly

political interest in Afghanistan and declining amounts of aid to Afghan refugees. These trends are argued to be directly linked to the enormous repercussions of the collapse of the Soviet Union on the geopolitical priorities of the international (aid) community. The decision to terminate aid is argued to be a thoroughly geopolitical act, and donor influence was of paramount importance. Now that the refugees no longer fulfil a strategic role, there appears to be little concern about them in the West, even with the current interest in the rise of the *Taliban* militia. This paper has demonstrated that UNHCR has altered its priorities in the post-Cold War era. Even though it claims to be apolitical, it is still bound by the geopolitical agendas of the donors upon which it is dependent.

While the world community at large may have forgotten Afghanistan, this paper argues that a proxy war continues to fight out the competing geopolitical agendas of Afghanistan's neighbours. Afghanistan retains its strategic significance as it is at the centre of an emerging economic, cultural and social bloc of non-Arab Islamic nations. The regional powers have been shown to be competing for influence in a future Afghan government. Hopeful conclusions about the prospects for peace bedevil many accounts of Afghanistan's proxy war. This paper eschews such optimistic geopolitical assessments. It is better to hold a sceptical vision of Afghanistan's future and be proved wrong, than for over-optimistic expectations of the chances for peace to be confounded. Afghanistan is likely to remain politically unstable and a source area of refugees well into the foreseeable future. Ending the proxy war is difficult because attempts to secure peace involve increased foreign intervention which make the conflict all the more intractable.

The ending of assistance to Afghan refugees has been shown to be tied to attempts to rebuild Afghanistan as a geopolitical entity. The use of the nation-state as a structure upon which to rebuild Afghanistan is highly problematic, and clashes with localized power structures. The ending of aid was also based on the erroneous assumption that peace would settle in Afghanistan. This paper argues that in humanitarian terms aid has been ended prematurely, given the continued arrival of hundreds of thousands of Afghans displaced by the ongoing proxy war, and the needs of vulnerable refugees that remain in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. The research for this paper suggests repatriation has adverse humanitarian consequences but is very important geopolitically.

Broader implications

Aid is a geopolitical instrument and part of the foreign policies of donor states. The importance of overseas development assistance is argued to lie in the realm of geopolitics rather than officially proclaimed humanitarian intentions. As the world community enters a post-Soviet era, changes in foreign aid provision are part of a wider redefinition of donor states' overall foreign policy priorities or 'geopolitical codes' (Grant and Nijman, 1995: 215). This paper has suggested that prospects for achieving the humanitarian intentions of foreign aid are limited as long as world affairs are orchestrated by nation states, and the process of providing aid is linked to national geopolitical agendas. It is important for the academy to look beyond, and theorise alternatives to, the nation-state as the fundamental unit of geopolitics.

This paper argues that it is important to question whose interests are being served by international assistance in the context of refugee situations: the host countries, the donors, the assisting agencies or the recipients. It appears that the NGOs serving refugees are more accountable to their donors than to their beneficiaries. UNHCR is also donor-dependent and charged with the geopolitical role of 'defending' the borders of the world's growing community of nation states, by ensuring that population movements across international boundaries are redressed by 'the preferred solution' (Ogata, cited in

Mitchell, 1995: 3) of repatriation. The imperatives of this geopolitical mandate may ignore the problematic humanitarian realities of the 'refugee' situations UNHCR is attempting to resolve.

The origins of the Afghan 'refugee crisis' and the continued conflict in Afghanistan are products of conflicting geopolitical agendas. It is important to conclude with the understanding that the decisions to provide and end assistance to Afghan refugees make perfect *geopolitical* sense but are highly problematic in *humanitarian* terms. This paper strongly contests Gorman's conclusion (Gorman, 1993: 291) that political and humanitarian objectives 'must be forged into an ongoing partnership'. As long as the world community allows the provision of foreign aid to be linked to geopolitics, international humanitarian and development assistance in refugee contexts will be inconsistent, counterproductive and highly contradictory.

The number of refugees in the world today is the largest it has ever been. There are estimated to be about 23 million refugees world-wide and another 26 million internally displaced (Ogata, cited in Mitchell, 1995: 4). While the number of 'refugee' situations requiring international assistance has risen, the amount of Western overseas development assistance available has fallen to $53 billion, its lowest figure in the last 23 years (Brown, 1996: 158). As the 1990s come to an end, growing numbers of 'refugee crises' are likely to emerge as the nation-state comes under increasing pressure as a viable geopolitical entity. This will bring the geopolitical decision making behind the provision and termination of aid into increasing focus, as growing numbers of 'refugee crises' stretch increasingly limited aid resources.

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Notes

1. 'Student' militia group participating in the Afghan proxy war.
2. Non-combatant public.
3. The covering of the face and body of women in public, and the general seclusion of women.
4. For a more detailed discussion of the various dimensions of this involvement, see Wood (1989: 349).
5. The emigration of the prophet Mohammed from Mecca, where he faced persecution, to Medina, where he was offered sanctuary, in the year 622 (see Abu-Sahlieh, 1996: 37–57).
6. People of the *hijra*.

7. The 'homeland' claimed by some Pathans which is composed of Eastern Afghanistan and part of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province.
8. 'Orthodox' Muslims, who recognize the first four Caliphs and adhere to one of the four Sunni Schools of Law.
9. A code of honour adopted by Pathans that prescribes appropriate behaviour.
10. Charity.
11. Asylum.
12. For further discussion of the cultural dimensions of Afghan refugees in NWFP, see Ahmed and Hart (1984: 192–221); Anderson (1984: 266–287); Farr (1990: 134); Janata (1990: 60–70); Olesen (1995: 29–36) and Shalinsky (1994: 3).
13. The Pathan practice of the groom's family paying the bride's family for their daughter.
14. For further discussion, see Roy (1990: 84–97).
15. For further discussion, see RPG (1992: 5) and Centlivres (1993: 5).
16. Holy warriors, participants in a *jihad*.
17. For a chronology of events leading to the mass exodus, see Ademec (1991) (1996) and Klass (1987). For a fuller discussion of these events, see Bhasin (1984); Bradsher (1985); Brigot and Roy (1988); Engin (1982); Freedman (1991); Ghaus (1988); Griffiths (1981); Hammond (1984); Hyman (1992); Newell (1972); Olesen (1995) and Wakman (1985).
18. For further discussion, see Macklin (1995: 218) and Ruthström-Ruin (1993).
19. The American Government's overseas aid department.
20. For further discussion of the politicization of aid, see Adkin and Yousaf (1992); Granchev (1980: 38–80); Jalalzai (1996: 158); Lohbeck (1993); Merriman (1987: 71); Novosti Press Agency (1981: 66–110) and Rubin (1995b: 196–201).
21. Seven Afghan political parties based in Peshawar Pakistan, and united in their efforts to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan.
22. For further discussion of the process of negative symmetry, see Khan (1991); Maley and Saikal (1989) and Rogers (1992b).
23. The title accorded to religious scholars and dignitaries in Iran and Central Asia.
24. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrghizstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. For a more detailed discussion of the role of the Central Asian States, see Ferdinand (1994).
25. 'Holy war' to defend Islam from danger. Adult males must participate, but the *jihad* must end when Islam is no longer under threat.
26. For further discussion of Russia's post-Soviet foreign policy, see Cummings (1996: 71–87); Freedman (1991); Hauner (1990) (1991) and Wyatt (1996: 89–120).
27. 'Partisan' Muslims who advocate the candidacy of Ali ibn Abi Talib and his descendants as successors to the Prophet Mohammed.
28. For more detailed discussion of the tension between tribe and state in Afghanistan, see Ahmed and Hart (1984); Babic and Huldt (1993: 10); Debrix (1996: 75); Horsman and Marshall (1994: 264); Joffé and Pennell (1991); Maley and Saikal (1991); Olesen (1995: 31) and Tapper (1983).
29. It is important to consider Smyke's comment (Smyke, 1995: 54) that it is inadequate to label *all* female refugees as vulnerable by virtue of being women.
30. Village chief or tribal leader in an Afghan refugee tented village.
31. According to Article 33 of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the status of refugees, states must not expel or return a refugee to territories where his or her life or freedom would be threatened (see Stenberg, 1989: 171).
32. For more detailed discussion of the politics of repatriation, see Harrell-Bond (1985); Keely (1996: 1058–1059) and Koser (1995: 178).

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Appendix

Summary of organisations interviewed for this paper

Non-Governmental Organisations

Afghan Medical Aid (AMA)	Director
Afghan Obstetrics/Gynaecology Hospital (AOGH)	Director
Austrian Relief Committee for Afghans (ARC)	Administrative Coordinator Rural Development Programme Coordinator Sanitation and Basic Health Coordinator
Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)	Deputy Director
Help the Afghans Foundation (HAF)	Director
Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe (HG)	Representative
Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA)	Executive Director Afghanistan
Norwegian Church Aid/Norwegian Refugee Council (NCA/NRC)	Residential Representative
Save the Children: UK (SCF-UK)	Information Assistant/System Officer Liaison Officer (Herat)
Save the Children: USA (SCF-US)	Field Office Director
Serve (SERVE)	Executive Director
Solidarite Afghanistan Belgium (SOS-PG)	Director
Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA)	Chief Technical Advisor
The Ockenden Venture (OV)	Field Director Marketing and Administration Manager

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

(Islamabad)	Assistant Information Officer
(Peshawar)	Associate Repatriation Officer Social Services Officer

Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR)

(Peshawar)	Coordinator (P&R)

humanitarian decision to assist Afghan refugees in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province are explored and the way the provision of aid itself became heavily politicized and fulfilled a geopolitical role is examined.

In the post-Soviet era levels of aid to Afghan refugees have fallen dramatically. The geopolitical context to this trend is explored and the geopolitical reasonings behind the decision to end aid are examined in detail. The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan by February 1989, the fall of Najibullah in April 1992 and the seizure of Kabul by the *Taliban*[1] in late September 1996 have not led to peace. It is argued that the intractability of this war can only be understood by focusing attention on the 'proxy' intervention of neighbouring states in Afghanistan's internal affairs. The competing geopolitical agendas of Afghanistan's neighbours are being fought out by the militias involved in the ongoing conflict. The argument that aid is being terminated prematurely is examined with reference to the situation of Afghans forcibly displaced by the post-Soviet conflict and the circumstances of vulnerable Afghans among the remaining refugees. The inadequacy of attempts to support these two groups of Afghans is highlighted by comparison with the efforts being made to secure their repatriation. This paper questions the dominance of repatriation in policy formulation on the ending of refugee situations. The willingness of the international community to secure the repatriation of Afghan refugees is argued to show the vital geopolitical role of repatriation in reconnecting *people* deemed to be Afghan with a *place* deemed to be Afghanistan. Linking the provision and termination of aid to geopolitics is shown to be highly problematic in humanitarian terms. This paper will conclude with a discussion of issues arising from the Afghan context, followed by a consideration of the broader implications.

Theoretical perspectives

This paper focuses upon two interrelated areas of academic enquiry, the study of aid and the study of refugees. Although there are 'problems of exact definition and precise boundaries' (Forsythe, 1989: 67) aid is understood to refer to all forms of humanitarian and development assistance, provided in a short-term emergency context and longer-term 'capacity building' context. This includes food rations, water, shelter, health care, education and general infrastructure. Within geography the research frontiers relating to aid and refugees have only recently been formed. Black (1991: 293) notes that 'refugee studies is still a relatively new and growing field of enquiry' after the 'years of indifference' shown by political and population geographers. Perhaps this is due to an overemphasis on 'regular' forms of migration, such as labour movements and urbanization. A lacuna in geographic research also exists in the study of aid. One possible reason for this omission may lie in O'Loughlin's (O'Loughlin, 1986; cited in Holdar, 1993: 465) suggestion that communication and contact between academic geography and disciplines such as politics, economics and international relations, that have traditionally considered aid issues, has until recently been limited. Geographical studies also have a tendency to generalize the character of relations between More and Less Developed Countries (e.g. Rostow, 1960; Peet, 1991), and thus not investigate specific aspects, such as aid, in any great detail.

Although refugee and aid issues may have traditionally received little attention in geography, a recent expansion in geographic discourse has taken place. With regard to refugees there are now some edited collections, such as Black and Robinson (1993) *Geography and Refugees* and Rogge (1987) *Refugees: A Third World Dilemma*. Several geographers have written articles on refugee issues in the last few years (Black, 1991,

1994; Luciuk, 1991; Wood, 1989, 1994, 1996) and new interdisciplinary journals have been established, such as *The Journal of Refugee Studies*. This has allowed refugees to become 'an important research topic' (Kenzer, 1991: 189) in geography. The creation of a 'new geopolitics' (O'Loughlin and Anselin, 1992: 19) in which the findings from international relations and politics have been incorporated into geographic analysis (e.g. Corbridge and Agnew, 1991; Grant, 1993) has established a frontier which offers good opportunities for the study of aid. This is reflected in recent contributions by geographers (Dietz and Houtkamp, 1995; Grant and Nijman, 1995, 1997; Holdar, 1993; Michalak, 1995). A major part of this paper explores the provision and ending of humanitarian and development assistance to refugees, and examines the impacts of these processes on the recipient population. It is the intention of this paper to embrace and unite the dynamic and expanding research frontiers relating to both aid and refugees.

This paper accepts Cohen's definition (Cohen, 1973: 29) of geopolitics as 'the relation of international political power to the geographical setting' and Keely's comment (Keely, 1996: 1046) that 'refugee production is rooted in geopolitical structure' and attempts to answer his call (Keely, 1996: 1063) for a 'thorough re-evaluation of the scope, content, and objectives of the international aid regime'. This paper responds to Reynell's observation (Reynell, 1989: 18) that reference to the 'surrounding political context' is 'frequently played down or ignored' and yet is 'absolutely essential' to a full understanding of the relationship between refugees and the international humanitarian community. This paper also offers a response to Black's call (Black, 1991: 287) for geographers to try to understand refugee issues by focusing on 'deeper geopolitical issues', and to Mabogunje's appeal (Mabogunje, 1984: 32) for the central concern of a geography of aid to be the study of the *impacts* of aid. By addressing the regional dimension of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, this paper seeks to elaborate the 'emerging geopolitical landscape of Eurasia' (Hunter, 1996: 316).

Whilst the research frontier at which this paper is situated may be fertile, the body of geographic theory upon which it rests is relatively barren. Both Wood (1994: 629) and Black (1991: 781) acknowledge the absence of a corpus of theory in refugee studies, and Holdar (1993: 467) highlights the absence of comprehensive theory relating to foreign aid. It is the intention of this paper to focus on the causal factors behind the provision and ending of assistance to Afghan refugees, and in so doing expand academic discourse relating to aid provision in the post-Cold War era; the so-called 'new aid regime' alluded to by Grant and Nijman (1995: 217) and Holdar (1993: 466). This paper accords with the theoretical perspective of 'foreign aid as an instrument of foreign policy' (Liska, 1960: ix). More particularly, it is taken that 'all humanitarian action has a political content because it takes place within a political context' (Macalister-Smith, 1985: 72). Discussion will also take in an analysis of the consequences of providing and terminating aid, considering repatriation—a process which is not clearly understood or conceptualized (Koser, 1995: 181) and on which there is a 'dearth of substantive research papers and reports' (Sepulveda, 1995: 83).

'Existing research on refugees and aid is fragmentary' (Black, 1991: 285), but the study of refugees 'has to integrate insights gained from the different social science disciplines' (Kibreab, 1983: 8). By harnessing a geographical perspective the relationships between political, social, environmental, economic and cultural factors may be uncovered, contributing to a broader and more cohesive understanding of the reactions of states, Inter-Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to refugees, and the experiences of individuals in a refugee context. Although each refugee

crisis is unique, the underlying economic and political dilemmas and cumulative experiences of host governments, relief agencies and refugees are often quite similar. Ideally this paper will generate conclusions which will be relevant to other contemporary refugee crises and to those yet to emerge. Geographers clearly have much to offer in an era when the number of forcibly displaced people is growing, and when the number of situations meriting international assistance is on the increase.

Methodological considerations

Focusing the paper in the context of Afghan refugees in Pakistan offers the chance to expand the 'relatively limited' (Rogge, 1987: 2) amount of refugee research that has been done in the South Asian context. The research for this paper was based in part on overseas field work. To uncover the causal factors behind the provision and termination of assistance to Afghan refugees, and the impacts this has made on the recipient population, the ideas, values, meanings and intentions of those involved had to be explored. This favoured a qualitative approach to primary data collection over quantitative methodologies which tend to generate 'bloodless categories of aggregate statistics' (Massey and Meegan, 1985: 167). The respondents interviewed fall into three categories (Appendix). Firstly, NGO personnel, who are 'among the best informed actors' (Copeland, 1992: 998), and who are responsible for implementing the provision and termination of assistance to Afghan refugees. The Appendix lists the fifteen NGOs selected for interview, out of the 201 still operating in Pakistan (Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, ACBAR, 1995a: i). They had all reduced (often dramatically) the level of aid they provided to Afghan refugees since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989.

Personnel from the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) formed the second group of interviewees (Appendix), and in their capacity as donor agencies they have much influence on policy making towards Afghan refugees. To understand the impacts of the ending of assistance Afghan refugees were also interviewed to gain a 'more comprehensive understanding of the refugee experience' (Needham, 1995: 65) by exploring the 'inner view of the actual experience of exile' (Centlivres, 1993: 46). This methodological decision was aimed at overcoming Pottier's comment (Pottier, 1996a: 403) that 'refugee views on humanitarian aid and problems of repatriation remain poorly understood' and so as to not 'overlook the views of the Afghan *awam*[2] ' (Payind, 1993: 924; WFP, 1988: ii). However, it must also be noted that McDowell (1994: 246) questions whether 'oppressed groups' are always best able to know their own needs, construct their own knowledge or understand their own position. The remaining refugees are concentrated in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. The long structured interview is 'one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury' (McCracken, 1988: 9), and is the methodological technique employed in this research as it allows 'atypical or idiosyncratic responses' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: 25) to be explored in detail. NGO, UN and CAR respondents were interviewed individually, whereas with the refugees two group interviews were conducted in Kacha Garhi and Nasar Bagh camps.

Long and intensive interviews are beset by a host of methodological problems. It is important to highlight these difficulties, explain how they were dealt with, and acknowledge the impact they may have had on the arguments made within this paper. Basing the research on intensive rather than extensive interviews reduces the survey sample size. This leads to doubts over the representativeness of the information generated. In the context of UNHCR and CAR this problem is minor, as the respondents

could articulate policy stances for their organisations as a whole. The fourteen NGOs interviewed were selected precisely because they were representative of the overall trends within the NGO community. Concerns over representativeness are most valid in the context of refugees, a problem also encountered in the works of English (1988: 38) and Glatzer (1990: 3). Eyles (1988: 7) suggests that long and intensive interviews are context dependent, and so the conclusions drawn from them can only be 'tentative' (Morton, 1992: A5.1). Care must thus be taken in generalising on the refugee results.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 19) note that word meaning can be 'slippery' and 'misinterpreted'. Much care was taken in designing the interview schedules to avoid leading questions and to make the queries meaningful and unambiguous. With the refugee interviewees an Afghan colleague acted as interpreter to overcome the language barrier. This complicated the situation in terms of accurately uncovering the ideas and values of the refugees, as there were many stages at which meanings could have been altered, between formulating questions in the field and incorporating the responses into the text of the paper. McCracken (1988: 21) expands upon one aspect of this multi-hermeneutic problem, questioning whether interviews merely capture the logic and categories of the interviewer, rather than the interviewee.

Using one's 'self as instrument' (McCracken, 1988: 19) requires flexibility, sensitivity, understanding and patience. These qualities were actively tested by the Pakistani research setting, and the intensity and number of interviews conducted. McDowell (1994: 242) suggests that most academic knowledge is generated by individuals who are white, middle class, Western and male. Interviewees are likely to have perceived me according to these categories of identity, and responded accordingly. Omidian (1994: 156) also suggests that Afghans distrust those who record what they say and do. Being male restricted access to registered female refugees, due to the 'gender barrier' (Eyles, 1988: 263) erected by Afghan notions of *purdah*[3]. The sample of refugees interviewed was varied in terms of socio-economic background and political persuasion, although the chance of clustering cannot be ruled out. The extent to which NGO, UNHCR and CAR personnel took an official line varied from respondent to respondent and within the course of each interview. Although the refugees may have avoided mentioning societally stigmatized issues, the group setting may have limited 'impression management' (Massey and Meegan, 1985: 156), as the presence of other respondents may have made it more difficult for each participant to tell blatant untruths. Every effort has been made to ensure that the research upon which this paper is based is accurate, and limits the methodological difficulties discussed above.

Origins of the refugee crisis

A legacy of foreign intervention

Afghanistan has held a strategic geopolitical position since the time of the 'Great Game' in the nineteenth century when Russia and Britain competed for regional supremacy. The invasion in 1979 was the culmination of increased Soviet involvement in Afghan affairs from the mid-1950s onwards. The USSR supplied economic assistance, funded several major infrastructural projects, and many Afghans received their higher education and military training in the USSR[4]. In the context of Afghan politics, Soviet influence dates back to the establishment of the Parcham and Khalq factions of the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1965.

to a Democratic Republic. Taraki is regarded as having been a 'pro-Soviet partisan' (UNHCR, 1989: 8). The earliest substantial refugee displacements took place between the April 1978 coup and the Soviet invasion in December 1979.

Taraki attempted to introduce a number of reforms: the elimination of land mortgages and tenant indebtedness (Revolutionary Council Decree (RCD) #6, 12/07/78), raising the minimum age for marriage and limiting the practice of 'bride price'[13] (RCD #7, 17/10/78), redistribution of agricultural holdings (RCD #8, 28/11/78) and the establishment of Soviet modelled state farms[14]. The population of Afghanistan is mostly rural, conservative and strongly Islamic and so the new government's policies met with stiff opposition as they 'interfered with the two pillars of rural Afghan society' (Wood, 1989: 350), namely land and family. Only one of the twenty refugees interviewed for this paper left Afghanistan well before the Soviet invasion with twelve departing between 1979 and 1981. The brutality of the Soviet regime, including attacks on family members, arrests, fighting, general insecurity and the invasion itself, all represented threats to the personal security of individual Afghans and account for the majority of explanations given by the respondents for their departure. The effects of living under a Communist regime provided three important sets of incentives to depart. Firstly, Soviet attempts to incorporate the Afghans into the state structure via conscription and forced Communist Party membership. Secondly, the unacceptability of Communist state ideology and the education system established to propagate it, and finally, religious intolerance and a concomitant lack of Islamic government. The migration to Pakistan was perceived by the Afghans to be a *hijra*[15].

The first anti-Communist uprisings occurred on 20 July 1978 in Nuristan and Kunar, to which Taraki's regime responded with brutal military force; 'an over-reaction that fuelled the civil war' (Wood, 1989: 350). As relations between Taraki's regime and the population deteriorated, the first major flows of refugees arrived in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. On 14 September 1979 another coup d'état took place with Hafizullah Amin replacing Taraki. Amin's rule was 'harsher and more repressive' (Jones, 1982: 2) than his predecessors as he tried to stamp out opposition in the rural areas. According to Jones (1982: 2), the principal effect was to increase resistance to the government, and on 23 October 1979 an attack on Kabul airport marked the first offensive by opponents of Amin claiming to be *Mujahidin*[16]. Soviet troops arrived on Christmas day to give support to the beleaguered regime. Two days later Amin was executed, having fallen from favour with the Soviets, and on 1 January 1980 Babrak Karmal took power[17]. Within six months the number of refugees in Pakistan exceeded a million. This figure continued to rise throughout the 1980s, peaking at about 3.2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan in 1989 (English, 1989: 16). Slightly less than three-quarters were settled in 249 'Refugee Tented Villages' (RTVs) throughout Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. *Table 1* summarizes the cumulative total of Afghan refugees in Pakistan from 1977 to the Soviet departure in 1989. Extreme care must be taken with estimates of refugee numbers, as they are highly 'inaccurate' (English, 1989: 16). Furthermore, anything from 500 000 to one million unregistered refugees are estimated to be in Pakistan.

The provision of aid

The refugee: a problematic theoretical concept

The provision of assistance to Afghans in Pakistan after the Soviet invasion was predicated upon and targeted at 'refugees'. This category of social analysis is the 'salient status' (Farr

TABLE 1. Cumulative total of Afghan refugees in Pakistan (1977–1989)

Year	*Month*	*Number of refugees*
1977		1 500
1979	October	200 000
1980	January	500 000
	April	700 000
	July	1 000 000
1981	February	1 400 000
	May	2 000 000
1983	June	2 300 000
1984	December	2 508 255
1987	April	3 109 696
1989	January	3 200 000

Source: Khalilzad (1995: 148).

1990: 137) to the international aid organisations, who control the assistance resources. The restrictive 1951 UN Convention defines refugees as all those 'outside their own country, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution, for reasons of race (sic), religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion'. The less restrictive 1967 Protocol of the Organisation of African Unity (Holborn, 1975: 177–194; Smyser, 1987: 10–24) also includes individuals fleeing natural disasters, foreign intervention and civil unrest. In spite of these two sets of criteria, defining who is and who is not a refugee, arouses considerable controversy, involving both legal and theoretical problems (Weiner, 1996: 186). By employing the category 'refugee' the international community is only able to respond to the plight of forcibly displaced individuals who cross an international boundary and not internal migrants. Most forced migrants 'defy' (Edwards, 1986: 313) universal categories of definition, so by applying the term in the Afghan context, the migrants' own categories of identity and difference (such as those derived from the concepts of *Pushtunwali* and *hijra*) are ignored. This can be detrimental to the effective delivery of assistance, as the cultural and social context in which aid is received is ignored. These theoretical difficulties with the term 'refugee' lead Burns (1994: 96) to contradict Farr's 'salient status' argument (Farr, 1990: 13), and question whether the concept is not only losing significance in academic circles, but also in the wider world of immigration and national policy making[18]. Cimade *et al.* (1986: 112) 'felt the need of a better definition of the term "refugee"' and Black (1991: 281) goes so far as to see the term as a 'chaotic conception'. Copeland (1992: 994) makes the important point that pondering over how effectively the term 'refugee' has been defined is a somewhat fruitless activity because ultimately, where forced international migrants are involved, the decision of 'who is of concern' is based on a 'political process', rather than international legal definitions. So the term refugee is not only in theoretical crisis, but also often has little practical impact on the *decision* to provide aid to people who are forcibly displaced.

Geopolitical motivations for assisting displaced Afghans

In the Afghan context the redundancy of the term refugee is exemplified by the fact that Pakistan never became a contracting party to either the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol. According to the Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees (CAR, 1984: 143):

> The Government of Pakistan has granted temporary asylum to Afghan nationals fleeing their country in the wake of political repression and occupation by foreign troops. The asylum has been granted on humanitarian grounds, as well as for reasons of cultural, ethnic and religious affinity between the peoples of the two countries.

This official account totally misses the political dimensions. The Government of Pakistan had to take an active stance in all refugee matters so as not to lose its influence in the 'tribal areas' which surround the Durand Line. The majority of the refugees settled here, and it is a region over which the Pakistani state has only limited jurisdiction. Soon after the invasion an Alliance of Afghan political parties, dedicated to the removal of Soviet forces in Afghanistan, was established in Peshawar. This offered the Government of Pakistan the chance to 'determine the future government of Afghanistan' (Baitenmann, 1990: 63) by cultivating cooperative allies. By supporting those rebel parties which emphasized their Islamic identity over their ethnic (usually Pathan) loyalty, the issue of the creation of an independent *Pushtunistan*, which had long threatened Pakistan's national integrity (Kaur, 1985: 8–77; Quddus, 1982: 89–168; Samad, 1995: 114; Tayyeb, 1966: 195–199) could be defused. The link between Afghan political parties and refugees was made explicit by only granting refugee status to individuals who could produce a certificate of party membership 'duly signed and attested by a representative of one of the recognized political parties' (Yusuf, 1990: 271). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the arrival of militant anti-Communist Afghan refugees made Pakistan a key regional geopolitical buffer against Communist expansionism (Grasselli, 1996: 3; Reynell, 1989: 20), and gave the government of Pakistan leverage on the West for international economic and military assistance.

Holdar (1993: 458) and Grant and Nijman (1997: 33) give useful discussions of theoretical approaches to aid provision. Firstly, the power-political hypothesis, in which aid is given to gain support from the recipients. Secondly, the political stability and democracy hypothesis in which aid is allocated to democratic states with favourable human rights records. Thirdly, the development and performance hypothesis, in which aid is given to countries with the best development prospects for the future. Finally, the strategic-defensive or Cold War hypothesis, in which aid was given by Western donors (in competition with the USSR and other socialist states), to gain influence in Less Developed Countries or to support states under pressure from external or internal communist threats (Wittkopf, 1973: 869; McKinlay and Mughan, 1984: 72). Pakistan held a vital strategic position in containing the Soviet expansionism expressed by the occupation of Afghanistan. The 1979 invasion of Afghanistan was after all 'an unprecedented development representing the first projection of Soviet military power outside the Soviet bloc/Warsaw pact countries since World War II' (Jones, 1982: 3), with Soviet forces even entering Pakistani territory (Haqqani, 1984: 36).

The United States was the largest source of finance for relief projects with Afghan refugees in the 1980s, supplying about one-third of all funding for refugee aid. The provision of US assistance bears 'an almost exclusive relationship' to US foreign policy on Afghanistan, which was aimed at keeping it within America's 'sphere of influence' (Decker and Sexton, 1992: 303). The US attempted to compensate for the political weakness of Pakistan based *Mujahidin* factions by providing them with 'massive cross-border "humanitarian aid"' (Harrison, 1990: 54). Peter Rees, director of Afghan Aid (cited in Harrison, 1990: 54) comments that 'the US aid package is putting a lot of money into the political arena and away from direct humanitarian aid'. Marsden (1991: 5) provides a useful discussion of how fluctuations in US aid provision have been very closely related to

political developments. This is exemplified by Reagan's call for the USSR to be driven from Afghanistan by 'all means available' (cited in Marsden, 1991: 5) coinciding with a peak in US aid to Afghan refugees and the provision of 'Blowpipe' and 'Stinger' anti-aircraft missiles to the *Mujahidin* (September 1986, Urban, 1990: 195). Much US aid to Afghans was an extension of the war effort against the Soviets, meaning the refugee camps served 'the military purpose of recruiting guerrillas' (Rais, 1993: 907).

The examples discussed above suggest the Afghan refugees fell within the US strategy of supporting anti-Communist forces with non-lethal (and at times lethal) aid. Holdar (1993: 459) makes the link between aid and arms explicit by stating that there is a 'strong correlation between (US) aid receipts and arms transfers'. Some observers (Rais, 1993: 907) characterize this policy as one aimed at 'bleeding' (Hyman, 1992: 254) the Soviet Union dry. Without massive amounts of aid the US government feared that 'Pakistan might abandon its stalwart opposition to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in favour of a policy of accommodation with the USSR' (Baitenmann, 1990: 68). Baitenmann (1990: 73) goes as far as to argue that 'the NGO network has been tapped by the US government to further its military policy in Afghanistan, so as to topple the Soviet-backed Afghan regime'. The US 'Cross-Border Humanitarian Assistance Programme' under USAID[19] was an example of such anti-Communist tactics. If the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) interviewee's comment that '*the UN is the tool in the hand of America*' is taken on board, then the activities of UNHCR are also an extension of US foreign policy. Hyman's observation (Hyman, 1994: 233) that UN policy-making is characterized by 'the extraordinary dominance of the United States' goes some way towards corroborating this argument. The situation may now be changing with the removal of the US from the UN budget committee.

Even this brief overview of geopolitical motivations suggests that the decision by donors to assist Afghan refugees was based more on geopolitical than humanitarian reasonings. Holdar (1993: 461) elaborates upon this, stating that 'most analysis of the humanitarian rationale for giving aid has failed to support the hypothesis that economic aid goes to the countries with the highest development needs', and Enos (1993: 875) adds that 'the key explanatory variables for bilateral aid as a whole' are 'political and security interests'. The geopolitical motivations in the Afghan case are captured in Kushkaki's somewhat extreme statement (Kushkaki, 1990: 116) that 'it is of paramount importance that the minimum is provided for these refugees so that they survive and do not die without fighting the enemy'.

The politicization of aid to Afghan refugees

The governments of Pakistan and America and the UNHCR are 'the major players' (Baitenmann, 1990: 62) controlling Afghan refugee policy, but the implementers of these policies have largely been NGOs. Walker (1995: 69), seemingly naïvely, states that 'impartiality, neutrality and consent must be the guiding principles in aid delivery'. Such a theoretical approach to aid provision clashes markedly with the reality of the Afghan situation in which the delivery of aid became heavily politicized. Baitenmann (1990: 62) notes that 'as in other war environments, the "humanitarian" work performed by these NGOs became, in many cases and to varying degrees, politicized', largely because of the high profile, East–West nature of the conflict. The HELP Germany (HG) interviewee noted this, stating that '*aid is always a political instrument*'.

Baitenmann (1990: 78–82) and Jalalzai (1996: 158–166) provide detailed analysis of some of the 300 or so NGOs that have been involved in the Afghan refugee situation,